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ABSTRACT

Assigning law enforcement officers to cover schools full-time as their beats proactively addresses concerns about juvenile crime and violence. The Center for the Prevention of School Violence trains School Resource Officers (SROs) and implements and evaluates SRO programs. In 1996, it developed a profile of officers serving North Carolina schools, using a questionnaire mailed to SROs and to law enforcement officers attending a 1997 National Association of School Resource Officers conference. About 48 percent of the respondents were city police officers, and 45 percent were sheriffs' deputies. Respondents were 74 percent white and 22 percent African American. They had wide-ranging experience in law enforcement. Most officers had attended training specifically to prepare them to be SROs. Just over half were responsible for only one school, and most covered high schools or middle schools. Nearly 80 percent worked in open-ended assignments. Officers spent about half of their time on law enforcement duties, 30 percent of their time on law-related counseling, and 20 percent of their time on law-related education teaching. Most performed the typical duty of inspecting their schools to improve physical security. Officers participated in numerous school activities. (SM)

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Center for the Prevention of School Violence

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RESEARCH BULLETIN

Center For The Prevention Of School Violence

February, 1998 Volume 1, Number 3

THE SCHOOL AS "THE BEAT": LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS IN SCHOOLS

Assigning law enforcement officers to cover schools full time as their beats is not a new strategy and is increasingly being turned to as law enforcement agencies and schools coordinate their efforts in proactive ways to address concerns about juvenile crime and violence. The 1997 National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) conference held in Greensboro, North Carolina, afforded the Center for the Prevention of School Violence an opportunity to develop a knowledge base concerning officers from across the nation who are serving in schools.

The strategy of officers serving in schools is familiar to the Center. Since its creation in 1993, the Center, based in Raleigh, North Carolina, has been involved with the development of the School Resource Officer (SRO) approach in North Carolina. During this time period, the number of SROs in North Carolina has grown from a small number to over four hundred. The Center has played a role in the training of SROs and in implementing and evaluating SRO programs.

In 1996 the Center developed a profile of officers serving in schools across North Carolina using a questionnaire that was administered by mail to SROs. A similar questionnaire was given to law enforcement officers who attended NASRO's 1997 conference. Over five-hundred people representing thirty-five states attended the conference. Approximately sixty-five percent completed the Center's questionnaire as part of a workshop they attended. Although not reflective of a random sample of either conference attendees or officers in schools nationwide, the questionnaire's results offer an opportunity to develop a profile of law enforcement officers across the nation who consider the schools their "beats."

WHAT ARE THE OFFICERS CALLED?

One of the difficulties with developing a profile of officers who are working in schools is that different names are used to describe the work they do. As might be predicted about a conference sponsored by the National Association of *School Resource Officers*, eighty-five percent of the questionnaire's respondents indicated that their positions are

designated "School Resource Officer." Other designations for officers serving in schools included "Student Liaison Officer," "Community Outreach Officer," and "School and Safety Education Officer."

WHO ARE THE OFFICERS?

Forty-eight percent of the officers who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they are city police officers, and forty-five percent are sheriffs' deputies. Almost two percent are school board police officers and just over one percent are military police officers.

Seventy-four percent of the responding officers are Caucasian, almost twenty-two percent are African-American, and two percent indicated that they are Hispanic, Native American, or "Other." Eighty-five percent are male and fifteen percent are female.

Officers who responded to the questionnaire ranged in age from twenty-two to sixty-six years with the median age of thirty-six.

Responding officers came from thirty-one of the thirty-five states represented at the conference (See Table One). Over half of these officers came from states other than North Carolina where the conference was held.

TABLE ONE:
STATES FROM WHICH RESPONDING OFFICERS CAME

Alabama	Mississippi
Arkansas	Missouri
California	New Hampshire
Colorado	New Mexico
Connecticut	New York
Delaware	North Carolina
Florida	Ohio
Georgia	Pennsylvania
Hawaii	South Carolina
Idaho	Tennessee
Illinois	Texas
Kansas	Utah
Louisiana	Virginia
Maryland	Washington
Michigan	Wyoming
Minnesota	

HOW ARE THE OFFICERS PREPARED TO WORK IN THE SCHOOLS?

Officers who responded to the questionnaire have wide-ranging experience in law enforcement which provides them with invaluable knowledge. This knowledge can help them in their work in schools. The median number of years experience was ten with one officer logging forty-two years in law enforcement. More officers had four-years experience than any other amount of years.

Ninety percent of the responding officers indicated that they had attended training

"specifically designed to prepare [them] to be a 'School Resource Officer.'" Several mentioned trainings sponsored by NASRO as well as "advanced SRO training."

Eighty-three percent said they have "a background" which has prepared them to work in the schools. Responses to this open-ended question included mentions of previous work with juveniles and involvement with community policing, teaching, and programs such as DARE (Drug Awareness Resistance Education) and G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education and Training).

Related to the officers' preparation for work in the schools is their desire to do so. Past Center research about SROs indicates that SROs who volunteer to work in schools are more likely to work successfully in those schools. Ninety-three percent of the responding officers indicated that they had volunteered to work in the schools.

HOW DO THE OFFICERS SERVE THE SCHOOLS TO WHICH THEY ARE ASSIGNED?

Another key to successful SRO assignments uncovered by past Center research involves how the officers serve the schools to which they are assigned. Assignments involving responsibility for coverage of only one school foster situations in which officers can more fully serve as *complete* resources for their schools. Just over fifty-five percent of responding officers said they are responsible for only one school, another seventeen percent for two schools, and five percent for three or four schools. The remaining seventeen percent indicated that they are responsible for covering five or more schools.

Thirty-eight percent of the officers are assigned to cover high schools, twenty-three percent cover middle schools, three percent cover elementary schools, and the remaining thirty-six percent cover combinations of schools (See Table Two).

TABLE TWO:
TYPES OF SCHOOLS COVERED BY RESPONDING OFFICERS
(N = 323)

SCHOOL TYPE	PERCENT
high school	38%
middle school	23%
elementary school	3%
high school and middle school	10%
high school and elementary school	2%
middle school and elementary school	7%
high school, middle school, and elementary school	15%
other	2%

Seventy-nine percent of the responding officers are working in open-ended assignments with nine percent working in schools as part of departmental rotational assignments. The rest described their assignments in terms of contract lengths or grant programs.

Sixty percent of the officers always wear their uniforms while working in their schools, six percent always wear casual clothes, and thirty-four percent wear either uniforms or casual clothes. An important part of an officer's uniform is her/her gun, and ninety-seven percent of the responding officers indicated that they carry their guns while working at their schools.

Eighty-nine percent of the responding officers do not attend roll call at their departments when they begin their shifts but instead begin their days at their schools. Eighty-eight percent have offices in their schools.

Twenty-five percent of the responding officers work forty hours per week in their schools; another nineteen percent work fifty hours per week; the remaining officers indicated they work anywhere from five hours per week to seventy hours per week in their schools.

WHAT DO THE OFFICERS DO IN THEIR SCHOOLS?

What the officers do when they work in their schools is an important component of the building knowledge base. The training of School Resource Officers in states such as Florida and North Carolina focuses on three roles these officers ideally fulfill while working in schools. These roles are those of law enforcement officer, law-related counselor, and law-related education teacher.

Conference attendees were asked what percentage of time they spend on each of these roles. Responding officers indicated

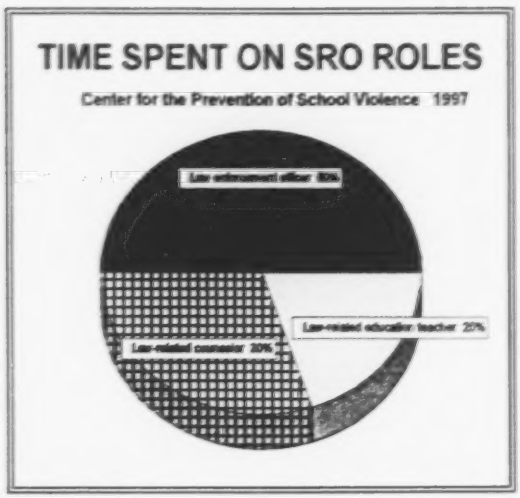
TIME SPENT ON SRO ROLES
Center for the Prevention of School Violence 1997
Law enforcement officer 50%
Law-related counselor 30%
Law-related education teacher 20%

Figure One

that they spend approximately fifty percent of their time performing their law-enforcement role, thirty percent of their time on law-related counseling, and twenty percent of their time on law-related education teaching (See Figure One).

With reference to specifics concerning these roles, eighty-seven percent of the responding officers indicated that they perform the "typical" law enforcement duty of inspecting their schools in efforts designed to improve the schools' physical security.

As part of the law-related counseling role, officers refer students to various community services (See Figure Two). Ninety-eight percent of the responding officers maintain an "open-door" policy which enables students to interact freely with them, including coming to them when they need advice. The most often cited number of "law-related counseling sessions" per week approximated by responding officers was five.

Wide variations in the amount of law-related education teaching officers do in classrooms were revealed by responding officers. The range in the number of "classroom lessons or presentations" per

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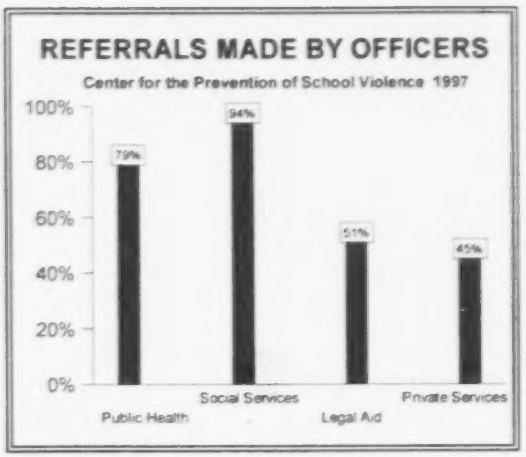

Figure Two

week was from zero for nine percent of responding officers to fifteen or more for four percent of the officers. The most often cited number was two lessons per week.

Responding officers indicated that they participate in numerous school activities. Included in this participation is involvement with school clubs, parent-teacher organizations such as PTAs, school athletic teams, field trips and community outreach programs (See Figure Three).

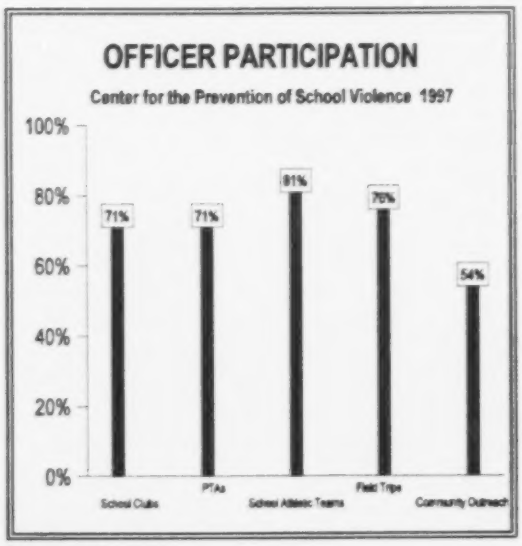

Figure Three

WHAT DO OFFICERS THINK ABOUT WORKING IN THE SCHOOLS?

What the officers think about working in the schools completes the knowledge base being built from the conference questionnaire. Responding officers were given an opportunity to "write any additional comments, positive or negative, [they had] about working in a school environment." Comments written by over a third of the officers were almost unanimously positive. A selection of the responding officers' comments include:

- "I wouldn't want to do anything else."
- "It is the most rewarding law enforcement job."
- "It offers an opportunity to make a change in kids' lives and to be a role model."
- "It is rewarding to see negative to positive changes in the students."
- "I love working in a school because I feel I am making a difference for the first time."

A CONCLUDING THOUGHT

As increasing numbers of law enforcement officers define their "beats" as schools, the knowledge base reflected above will grow. NASRO and the Center for the Prevention of School Violence will build upon this base in efforts to help ensure that the assignment of officers to schools will be positive for these schools and rewarding for the officers in ways similar to those described above in the officers' own words.

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